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AUTHOR	Morris, Roger N.
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ABSTRACT

Noting that the growing popularity of year-round schools (extended calendar without increasing the number of school days) has coincided with an increase in school accountability, this report provides a descriptive case study on one year-round school located within a large elementary school district in central Virginia. An optional year-round school for grades K through 5 was implemented with multiage grouping during the 2001-2002 school year. This study examined the perspectives of parents, students, teachers, and administrators on the year-round school. Data collection methods included historical document analysis, open-ended interviews with stakeholders, and focus group discussion. Seven parents and three administrators were interviewed, and four teachers participated in a focus group discussion. Findings revealed that participants were positive about the year-round school and suggested changes that included revising intersessions, changing the multiage grouping component, and improving communication between the school and parents. Participants focused on continuity of education as a major reason for participating in the year-round school. The impact of the multiage grouping was identified by administrators and parents as being as important as the year-round calendar. (Contains 44 references.) (KB)

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Roger N. Morris

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A CASE STUDY ON THE PERSPECTIVES OF AN OPTIONAL K-5 YEAR-ROUND/MULTI-AGE PROGRAM IN VIRGINIA

By Roger N. Morris, Ed. D.

Introduction

The growing popularity of year-round schools has coincided with the increase in accountability for schools. With increased accountability, school districts across America are considering the alteration of the school calendar as a way to initiate change. Other reasons researchers have identified as reasons for implementing a year-round calendar include reduced overcrowding, higher student attendance and safer schools.

This is a descriptive, historical case study on the Laurel Ridge (pseudonym) year-round school, a school located within a large elementary school in Central Virginia. The Laurel Ridge County school division implemented an optional year-round school with multiage grouping during the 2001-2002 school year. There was a need to determine the community values and social/political climate surrounding Laurel Ridge 's year-round school. Therefore the purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of parents, students, teachers, and administrators on the year-round school. To document the perspectives on the Laurel Ridge year-round school the following questions were answered by this study:

- What impact has the year-round calendar had on the work and/or lives of parents, students, teachers, and administrators?
- Have the year-round calendar and the traditional calendar influenced each other?
- In creating a year-round school, what changes would be made if other year-round schools were proposed in the future?

The purpose of this study was to provide additional research on stakeholder perspectives on year-round schools and how action research might be used to improve current practice and provide information for future decisions. In order to identify these improvements the action research model of qualitative research was used. Action research identified potential changes to the school. Three methods were used to collect information – historical document analysis, open-ended interviews, and focus group discussion. Seven parents and three administrators were interviewed, while four teachers participated in a focus group discussion. All participants were involved in the year-round school.

Participants were positive about the year-round school and suggested changes that included revising intersessions, and changing the multiage grouping component, and better communication.

The growth of year-round schools has been phenomenal over the last fifteen years. Below is a table from the National Association of Year-Round Education, which outlines the growth of year-round schools in the United States (National Association for Year-Round Education, 2001):

Table 1
Growth Of Public Year-Round Education In The United States Over A 15-Year Period

SCHOOL YEAR	STATES	DISTRICTS	SCHOOLS	STUDENTS
1985-86	16	63	411	354,087
1986-87	14	69	408	362,669
1987-88	DATA	NOT	COLLECTED	
1988-89	16	95	494	428,961
1989-90	19	115	618	520,323
1990-91	22	152	859	733,660
1991-92	23	204	1,646	1,345,921
1992-93	26	301	2,017	1,567,920
1993-94	32	369	1,913	1,419,280

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1994-95	35	414	2,214	1,640,929
1995-96	37	447	2,368	1,754,947
1996-97	38	460	2,400	1,766,642
1997-98	38	496	2,681	1,934,060
1998-99	39	546	2,856	2,040,611
1999 – 2000	43	561	2,880	2,063,217
2000 – 2001	44	651	3,059	2,162,120
GROWTH RATE	175%	934%	645%	511%

In 1985-1986, there were sixteen states that had at least one year-round school. By the 2000-2001 school year, forty-four states had year-round schools, or an increase of 175% over sixteen school years. Sixty-three school districts had a year-round school in the 1985-86 school year, but sixteen years later that figure had grown 934% to 651. The number of schools showed a 645% increase over the same time period. This growth affected more students every year. Over the sixteen-year span, the number of students enrolled in a year-round school increased 511%.

Reasons for Growth of Year-Round Schools

There are several reasons for the growth in year-round schools. The following reasons are described:

- Achievement
- Overcrowding
- Attendance, Discipline, and School Safety

Achievement

Student testing and achievement became the primary focus of school districts across America as more states have implemented accountability measures in more schools. Virginia is no exception with the implementation of the Standards of Learning tests in 1998. School leaders, forced by new requirements, are examining ways to initiate change in their school divisions. The Virginia State Board of Education, through the Standards of Learning and Standards of Accreditation (2000), has developed an aggressive accountability process for both schools and students. In describing the requirements for graduation, the Virginia Department of Education described it like this (Virginia Department of Education, 2002):

> The students who entered the ninth grade during the 2000-01 school year will be the first required to earn 22 standard units of credit and six verified credits for a Standard Diploma, and 24 standard units of credit and nine verified credits for an Advanced Studies Diploma. To earn a standard unit of credit a student must complete 140-hours of instruction and pass the course. A verified unit of credit is earned by passing a course and its related Standards of Learning test or approved substitute test.

Previously, the requirements did not include the verified credit system, and students were required to complete 21 standard units of credit for graduation. Testing is also required for students in grades three, five, and eight. In these revised standards, schools must have 70% of their students pass certain subject areas of the tests in order to receive full accreditation. When the new No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is fully implemented, schools in Virginia will be required to test every child from grades three through eight (DeMary, 2002).

Overcrowding

Many schools in urban areas, such as Los Angeles, have implemented a form of year-round calendar that provides continuous use of schools buildings. The schools are on a quarter system, with some of the student population attending three times a year, staggered over the calendar year.

Attendance, Discipline, and School Safety

Virginia schools are required to distribute school performance report cards that, in addition to test scores, outline statistics related to discipline, attendance, and school safety. These report cards are sent home to every parent by mail. As a result, administrators, teachers, and parents are examining ways to not only improve test scores throughout the school division, but to maintain higher attendance and lower discipline rates, as outlined on the school report card. Parents especially perceive that schools with year-round calendars have higher attendance, better discipline, and are safer (Shields and Oberg, 2000).

As teachers and administrators are looking for strategies to assist students in these areas, the configuration of the school division calendar has come under close scrutiny to determine if changes in it can affect these areas. School boards usually rely on administrators, parents, and teachers for information on school calendar configurations prior to making decisions on implementing them.

Responding to Stakeholders

In addition to implementing change as a response to stakeholders' needs and desires, school administrators must also determine whether these needs and desires have changed over time. This is important for identifying problems and planning for future changes in the program (Smith, 1985). To improve year-round schools, school administrators must develop ways to gauge the attitudes of parents and teachers. By 1971, California had implemented more than a dozen year-round schools and by the middle 1980s only the Milpitas School District reported terminating a year-round school plan (Smith, 1985). The reason for the termination was a lack of parental support (Smith, 1985). Schlegel (1994) states that while parents and teachers generally support year-round schools, the decisions regarding the implementation and maintenance of year-round schools are based on the community's values and political/social climate. The challenge for administrators is to understand the stakeholders' level of support for their community's year-round school, and to stay informed about how stakeholders feel about the year-round school over time. Currently, there is a lack of research to document stakeholders' perspectives on year-round schools.

One year after the Laurel Ridge County School Board's decision to implement a year-round school, members of the Board are now questioning administrators about the perspectives parents, teachers, students, and administrators have on whether the year-round school should continue, and/or whether the year-round school should expand to include grades six through eight. Previously, no information existed that documents these perspectives. This data needed to be collected to measure the success of the school to this point and to suggest improvement strategies.

Research Question

There was a need to determine the community values and social/political climate surrounding the year-round school. Therefore the overall question was to determine the perspectives of parents, students, teachers, and administrators on the year-round school. To document the perspectives on the year-round school the following questions were answered by this study:

1. What impact has the year-round school had on the work and/or lives of parents, students, teachers, and administrators?
2. Have the year-round calendar and the traditional calendar influenced each other?
3. In creating a year-round school, what changes would be made in the future?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide additional research on stakeholder perspectives on year-round schools and how action research might be used to improve current practice, and provide information for future decisions.

Significance of the Study

The impetus for this study emerged when I participated in the actual process of implementing the Laurel Ridge County year-round school.

How One School Implemented a Year-Round Calendar

In April 2001, a group of parents and teachers made a presentation to the Laurel Ridge County School Board, requesting that a year-round school be implemented. In this presentation, the year-round school body of research was presented, which outlined the advantages of the program. The school board requested the presentation because the parents and teachers submitted a charter school application that included implementing a year-round school as its focus. The parents stated that they wanted this year-round charter school because they believed it would improve achievement and provide more opportunities to learn. The Laurel Ridge County School Board compromised. In lieu of a charter school, the Board directed the Superintendent to start an elementary year-round school, beginning with the 2001-2002 school year and with a minimum of sixty students. When the year-round school started in July 2001, 157 students enrolled in the program and 153 continued to participate, as of April 2002.

The results of this study could direct administrators to specific attitudes that might need to change and for which change strategies could be developed. Since the Laurel Ridge County School Board was considering expansion, it was important for administrators to know which aspects of the program were or were not successful. The Laurel Ridge County School Division also implemented change in a very short period of time. As stated earlier, it was a political compromise made by the Board with the parents that started the school. Over the course of the last several months school leaders from across the state have contacted the school to determine if the process could be duplicated in other places.

The process of change is a constant challenge for administrators. As administrators work with other stakeholders to implement change, like converting to a year-round calendar, the process itself needs careful consideration. Faced with the dilemma to initiate change, administrators, teachers, and parents need to develop the most effective method that satisfies each constituent group. Senge (2000) describes this as the "shared vision initiative" which, in this context, provides opportunities where stakeholders are "invited to the process where they don't just look at problems but at their desired future (p. 301)."

Even though there are positive perceptions about the year-round school, my experiences as a teacher, school administrator, and a central office administrator indicate that in order to implement change and maintain change, perspectives about that change must be documented. Smith (1985) states that change such as implementing a year-round school directs "administrators to specific attitudes which might need changing and for which change strategies could be developed (p. 15)." Since the Laurel Ridge County School Board considered expanding the year-round school, they needed the information documented in this study in order to make an informed decision about maintaining and expanding the year-round school concept.

Methodology

Qualitative research methods were used because they provided the flexibility in both data collection and analysis to tackle the research question in a complex social environment. Since I was an active participant in the study, the action research model was appropriate because of my involvement in both the research process and the implementation of the year-round school. Stringer (1999) identified an example of a methodological design that was used in this study. According to Stringer (1999), a methodology should consist of a philosophical rationale, a research process, rigor, and an explanation of the ethical issues.

This study was conducted at the school that implemented the year-round calendar. The school is called Columbus Elementary School (pseudonym), located in Laurel Ridge County, Virginia. Columbus Elementary School has about 1,100 students enrolled in kindergarten through the fifth grades. Laurel Ridge County is a rural county in central Virginia and east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It has a population of approximately 22,000 residents and the school system has over 3,000 students in kindergarten through grade twelve (Laurel Ridge County School Board, 2002). There are five schools with a student-teacher ratio of 22 to 1 (Laurel Ridge County School Board, 2002). It is an agrarian community with a tax base that is largely real estate and has little industry. The western part of the county serves as a bedroom community for Vinegar Hill (pseudonym), the nearest city.

During the week of June 3, 2002, the interviews were conducted. The focus group discussion was conducted on June 4, 2002. Gaining access to the participants was critical to the completion of this study. As a community member, I have developed a high level of trust with both parents and teachers.

Data Collection Techniques

In the look-think-act routine of action research, stakeholders must have the opportunity to define the issue in their own terms and describe in detail their work (Stringer, 1999). This is considered the "look" part of the process. In this study, participants did this through the data collection activities described here. For qualitative research to be considered "information-rich", multiple perspectives must be considered (Patton, 1990). In order to identify these perspectives, multiple data collection techniques were used.

What impact has the year-round calendar had on the work and/or lives of parents, students, teachers, and administrators? In creating a year-round school, what changes would be made if other year-round schools were proposed in the future? Answering these questions was a part of the "think" portion of the action research process described earlier. Therefore, three methods for collecting data were used in this study:

- Historical document analysis
- Open-ended interview
- Focus group discussion

These data collection techniques are appropriate for action research, according to Mills (2000). The use of these methods in this study is described below.

Historical Document Analysis

Historical documents, such as reports and minutes of meetings were used to enhance the study. The documents were used as a basis to establish a timeline for the implementation of the year-round schools. The study was organized in part around this timeline. Documents were made available to me, as agreed to by the participants and authorities. Any documents relating to the planning of the year-round school were collected and analyzed to verify facts provided by the interviewees. Examples of these documents included school board meeting minutes, committee minutes, committee reports, teachers' schedules and the school calendar.

Open-Ended Interviews

Participants in this study were interviewed, based upon their experiences in their participation in the year-round school. Stringer (1999) stated that the use of interpretive questions caused participants to "to formulate interpretations of the problems under investigation (p. 93)."

At the beginning of the interviews, participants verbally provided biographical information. Information such as work and community experience, family makeup was collected. Participants' experiences were explored through in-depth interviews in order to understand Laurel Ridge's year-round school. Patton (1990) stated that interview data as allowing "the evaluator to capture the perspectives of program participants, staff, and others (p. 278-79)." In order to minimize variation in the questions posed to the interviewees, the standardized open-ended interview was conducted (Patton, 1990). These interviews were conducted on seven parents and three administrators.

Focus Group Discussion

To interpret issues, Stringer (1999) suggested a group process. The focus group discussion is appropriate for this interpretation. A focus group provided me with an opportunity to observe group interactions. Since teachers were the primary professionals who implemented the year-round school on a daily basis, it is appropriate for the focus group to center on teachers. Morgan (1997) suggested that five to ten questions that are open-ended are an appropriate amount.

For the purposes of the study four teachers were involved in the focus group discussion. The four teachers were selected based on the grade level they taught, the level of participation in the implementation of the year-round school, and the number of years of teaching experience. Varying these factors provided a diverse group of teachers.

Summary of Findings

The study's major findings focused on the research questions, in addition to other findings. These are described below.

Impact of the Year-Round School

The school has had an impact on the lives of the participants. When I asked this question to the participants, the answers varied. Parents, teachers, and administrators provided information on the impact of the year-round school on the students. This was based on gathering multiple perspectives (Stanford, 1998). In all of the interviews, I questioned the participants to state the impact the school had on themselves and the students. I have described their responses here.

The quotations are from transcriptions of the interviews and focus group discussion, and historical documents. These quotations have not been edited other than adding punctuation where needed and changing people, school, and county names to protect confidentiality. The following codes are used to identify the source of the information, while protecting the confidentiality of the participants:

Table 2
Table of Codes

Codes	Meaning of Codes
PI	Interview with a Parent from the Year-Round School
AI	Interview with a Laurel Ridge County Administrator
TF	Year-Round Teacher Involved in Focus Group Discussion

In the actual transcriptions, the number that follows the code *(PI-1)* indicates the person. Actual transcription quotations are in *italics*. For dialogue involving more than one person, as in the focus group discussion, I documented the conversation by placing the code at the beginning of the comment (*TF-1:*).

Students

In discussing their children, most of the parents stated that they enjoyed the year-round school. One parent (PI-2) declared, "He loves it" while another parent (PI-7) stated, "She likes it". One parent (PI-6) described her child as hating it when school begins in early August but "loves it" in the October break. One parent (PI-2) viewed the year-round school as helping with social skills, while another parent (PI-7) declared "she didn't struggle nearly as much with the SOLs as she did in the traditional school." Another parent (PI-1) also described the academics as "productive gains."

Teachers involved in the focus group discussion believed that the students were impacted less by the year-round calendar, but more by the multiage grouping. One teacher (TF-3) stated, "from a multi-age point of view ... there is less competition, more acceptance." Another (TF-2) stated that the students had "matured socially." This agrees with the parents' observations of growth. It seemed that most of the comments from the participants focused on the social aspects, more so than academic ones. One administrator (AI-3) agreed, "...it has changed their lives, their school lives and maybe their social lives."

Parents

When I asked the parents about the impact of the calendar two parents mentioned the change in vacation time and the after-school routine, while another parent became more active in the school as a result of the year-round school implementation.

> *For me personally, I have gotten more involved with her at school and at Columbus than I did when she was in traditional school. And I've gotten much pleasure out of that (PI-7).*

One parent (PI-5), who teaches in the school division, stated that it has impacted him because he is going to teach in the year-round school next year (proposed middle school program).

Teachers

In the focus group discussion, the teachers viewed the impact of the year on a personal and a professional level. One teacher (TF-2) expressed hope that the year-round school was healthier, due to an illness she has. One teacher (TF-3) used the words "fun" and "pride" to describe her feelings, but offered no impact statement. Two teachers offered a more professional perspective. One teacher stated

I think I have grown professionally by taking the courses and classes we've gone to and learning how to meet the needs of all children (TF-4).

The other 4/5 grade level teacher (TF-1) agreed and stated that the training was helpful, but also was concerned about the extra stress placed on her due to teaching fifth graders for the first time.

Administrators

Unlike teachers and parents, administrators offered little information about the impact. The principal (AI-1) did offer insight into her feelings prior to the implementation of the calendar. She (AI-1) stated that she was "scared to death." As the school was being implemented, she (AI-1) went from feeling scared to being "pulled in a different direction."

One of the other administrators (AI-2), who is no longer at the school, commented that he "wishes...(he)... was a teacher and working under that calendar." This statement, although brief, does offer a look from an administrator who has to observe the year-round school from afar.

The Relationship of the Traditional Calendar and the Year-Round Calendar

There is a relationship between the Laurel Ridge traditional calendar and the year-round calendar.

Student Achievement

Comparisons of student achievement between year-round schools and traditional schools are difficult because there are many confounding variables. Examples of these variables are calendar models, multiage classes, student demographics, team teaching, and extended day and after-school programs. Some studies have found a significant correlation between year-round schools and student achievement measured through test scores (Bradford, 1992). In Kneese's (2000) study, year-round students outperformed traditional students in 67.8% of the performance categories, based on thirty studies comparing the performance of year-round school students with traditional students. At the time of this study, the standardized test score results from the Laurel Ridge year-round school were not computed. I anticipate that based on the participants views, the year-round students would outperform the traditional students.

Configuration of Calendars

Examples of school calendars have been provided, which are:

- The traditional calendar has all students in a particular school district or division attending school from the middle of August until early June, or about ten months. Breaks include a two-week winter break and a one-week spring break.
- The single-track system, particularly the "45-15" design, provides 180 instructional days, divided into four nine-week grading periods, with approximately fifteen days of intersession (Kneese, 2000).
- The multi-track calendar "staggers the instructional and vacation/intersession periods of each track throughout the entire year, so that some students are receiving instruction while others are on vacation (Kneese, 2000)."

In comparing the Laurel Ridge traditional calendar and the year-round calendar, it was clear that the year-round calendar had almost all of the holidays and breaks as the traditional calendar. The principal (AI-1) stated that the calendars "complement one another" while two parents stated that transportation might be the reason for the correlation of the calendars. In examining both calendars it appears that they have influenced each other. As both calendars are developed in future years, I believe that both will influence each other more. As one parent (PI-7) who served on the calendar committee for next year stated,

I think they are going to influence each other more next year. Because next year, they all get out at the same time, where this year the year round kids don't get out until Tuesday. Traditional gets out tomorrow. Next year, which I got to help with for next year, everybody is getting out at the same time (PI-7).

Suggested Changes to the Year-Round School

Action research demands a suggested course of action (Stringer, 1999). As the researcher, I believe that I have obtained an "information-rich case" which suggests improvements to the Laurel Ridge year-round school. In this study, I classified changes that were suggested by parents, teachers, and administrators. These changes when combined, offered suggestions that would, in the views of these participants, improve the school. After examining the changes that have been suggested, I found that they could be classified into organizational changes and instructional changes. Organizational change was defined this way (ManagementFirst.com, 2001, http://www.managementfirst.com/articles/changes.htm):

> Organizational change is the implementation of new procedures or technologies intended to realign an organization with the changing demands of its business environment, or to capitalize on business opportunities.

Instructional changes involve changes in curriculum, grouping, or other method that have an instructional purpose. These suggestions were classified into themes. These themes were developed based on the responses. The developed themes are presented in the table below:

Table 3
Change Themes

Change Themes	**Type of Change**
Involve The Students In The Planning Of Intersessions	Organizational
Make The Calendar More Like The 45-15 Model	Organizational
Change Intersessions	Organizational
Better Communication	Organizational
Increase Volunteers	Organizational
Vary Science And Social Studies Instruction	Instructional
Kindergarten Orientation During Summer Intersession	Instructional
More Training For Staff	Instructional
Force Students To Take A Break	Instructional
Make It a Separate School	Organizational
Eliminate K/1 Grouping	Instructional
Have Specials Available During The Time Year-Round School Is In Session	Organizational

Seven out of the twelve suggestions are organizational, which can be used as a basis to change the organization to meet the stakeholders' needs.

Some of the longest comments from parents came when they suggested better communications between the school and the parents. Two parents suggested newsletters as a remedy, while another parent suggested that more clerical help would solve this problem. Two parents suggested that a separate building for the year-round school would alleviate some of the problems that have occurred this year. I question whether or not this is a realistic solution, but these comments do reflect the parents' belief that communication problems exist. Communication is a paramount concern in multiple studies regarding year-round schools (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2000 and Shields and Oberg, 2000). Wheatley (2000) also identified that change must involve each person in shaping the organization. Parent input, or more generally communication, was identified

by as a problem and a suggestion for change. From the beginning of the year-round school until the end of this school year, some of the parents identified communication and parental input as a concern. All of the suggestions deserve some discussion and are important to the people that have made them.

Instructional changes are more difficult to implement school-wide. One suggestion, "Vary Science And Social Studies Instruction" requires teacher collaboration, which organizational leaders can encourage but cannot control. However, school leaders affect some instructional changes. Senge (2000) identified school leaders who become involved in instructional change as "learner-centered (p. 417)." Therefore the school leaders at Laurel Ridge (including me) must determine whether or not these changes are beneficial to the learners – the students. All of these suggestions must be examined to determine whether or not they are feasible, realistic, and student-centered.

The comments were examined to determine what kind of change is suggested. The purpose of organizational change is to alter the organization to meets the needs of the stakeholders. In this case it includes parents, teacher, students, and administrators. Every need must be considered. Some suggestions are already being considered. These are involving the students in the planning of intersessions and providing a kindergarten orientation during the summer intersession.

More of these participants suggested a change in the intersessions, including the suggestions being implemented. I expected the intersessions to be a focus of the suggestions for change. In reviewing the changes in detail, all of the teachers indicated they wanted more meaningful intersessions focused on strengthening the remediation, while a parent used the term "more powerful" to describe the need for a change in intersessions.

Many of the other changes that were suggested by the participants are unique to the Laurel Ridge year-round school. Hunt (1974) stated that school districts must measure these attitudes at the specific school level, in order to provide direction. This fits with action research's "look-think-act" routine of evaluating specific programs to determine the needed changes (Stringer, 1999). The purpose of action research is "to solve problems in a program, organization, or community (Patton, 1990)." The four defining characteristics of action research are (Denscombe, 1998):

1. Practical
2. Change
3. Cyclical Process
4. Participation

These characteristics are present in identifying these suggestions for change. Feedback obtained in action research is a cyclical process continuing to provide information to administrators and other stakeholders (Stanford, 1998). To provide way to initiate the right kind of change, multiple perspectives were been documented (Stanford, 1998). The key for administrators is to identify the right kind of change and make decisions that will benefit the student-learner.

Other Findings

During the process of answering the research questions, I found that other pieces of information are noteworthy and are described here.

Historical Perspective

The historical perspective of the Laurel Ridge year-round school served at least two purposes. First it provided the reader with a perspective on what happened, which is essential to his/her understanding. Second, the historical perspective gave the stakeholders and me a chance to reflect on the process so that they could plan for the future. This narrative was developed to complement the action research routine of "look, think, act" (Stringer, 1999). In essence, this became the look part of the process, or the gathering of relevant information, and the think part of the routine, or the description of "how things are as they are (Stinger, 1999, p. 18)."

Why Participate in Year-Round Schools?

According to the literature review there were several reasons for participating in a year-round school. These reasons were increased achievement, reduced overcrowding, decreased discipline, increased attendance, and increased school safety (Bradford, 1992, Winger, 1993, Inger, 1994, and Shields and Oberg, 2000). The participants in the Laurel Ridge year-round school had different reasons. These reasons are grouped into these areas:

- Looping
- Continuous learning with intersessions
- Breaks
- Career Move
- Calendar

The reasons stated above are key words in the responses of the participants. While many of the comments from the participants are similar, all of the participants had their own motivations and reasons for participating in the year-round school, with most being student-centered. Others focused on the "continuity of education" and one teacher stated that it was an opportunity to change an aspect of her job. It is worthy to note that no reason stated in the literature was specifically mentioned, while other comments had nothing to do with the year-round calendar itself, but had more to do with the configuration of the school (i.e. multiage grouping).

As the study progressed, more of the multiage grouping became the issue. Multiage grouping had more impact on the school than I anticipated. There are benefits to multiage grouping. Katz (1995) stated that children in multiage grouped classes model older students' educational behavior such as complex activities. One teacher (TF-2) noted that she observed a student participating in an activity not realizing he/she was the oldest child. Students who are socially immature also benefit from multiage grouping, and Katz (1995) stated that cognitive development is improved. Katz (1995) also cautioned that older students through taunting might overwhelm some younger students. This may lead to lower self-esteem. None of the participants in the study observed this as being a problem.

Advantages and Disadvantages of a Year-Round Calendar

The advantages and disadvantages of the year-round calendar provided some link to the literature. In Table 4, I categorized the advantages in the literature and compared them to the responses of the participants:

Table 4
Advantages of Year-Round Schools vs. Advantages of the Laurel Ridge Year-Round Calendar

Advantages of the Year-Round Calendar (Shields and Oberg, 2000)	**Participants**		
	Parents	**Teachers**	**Administrators**
Vacations/Calendar Configuration	√	√	√
Positive Impact on Students (Academics, Attendance, etc...)	√		√
Positive Impact on Teachers (Attendance, Reduced Burnout, More Educational Opportunities, etc...)		√	√
More Efficient to Operate	√		
Families of Special Education Students More Involved			
Child Care			

The responses are ranked, based on the most to least similar responses. The way the calendar is configured (i.e. vacations) was recognized by all the stakeholder groups in this study as being an advantage. Parents and administrators viewed the year-round school as being better academically and socially for students. I was surprised that teachers did not observe this. I believe the reason for this is that the teachers believed that the multiage grouping was more of an advantage of the Laurel Ridge year-round school than the calendar. As expected, both teachers and administrators viewed the impact on teachers as an advantage. Surprisingly,

administrators did not state that the year-round calendar was more efficient to operate. This response came from parents. One of the advantages in the literature, childcare, is listed by one of the administrators as a disadvantage.

The disadvantages of a year-round school are less clear. Below is a table, which details these disadvantages, and those found in the Laurel Ridge year-round school:

Table 5
Disadvantages of Year-Round Schools vs. Disadvantages of the Laurel Ridge Year-Round Calendar

Disadvantages of the Year-Round Calendar (Shields and Oberg, 2000)	**Participants**		
	Parents	**Teachers**	**Administrators**
Vacations	√	√	
Child Care			√
Professional Development of Teachers		√	
Disrupted Routine			
Vacation Planning (Summer)			

There are several points to make on the disadvantages offered by the participants.

1. What was revealed in the interviews was that two administrators and two parents (PI-2, PI-4, AI-1, and AI-3) viewed the year-round school as having no disadvantages.
2. Some solutions were provided by the participants on how to cope with the disadvantages. For the childcare issue, the administrator suggested that the intersessions and an after-school program offered at the school might address it. For the issue of dealing with peers on a different calendar, the parent offered this solution: *When other kids are in school and mine are at home we do things (PI-3).*
3. While the literature did not record any disadvantages of the year-round calendar stated by the administrators, one administrator agreed that childcare is a disadvantage.
4. One disadvantage that is not in the literature, but is stated by the participants in this study is that students in the year-round school are on a different calendar than their peers. This disadvantage may be unique to the situation of offering both calendars in the same school division.
5. Two disadvantages recorded in the literature, vacation planning and disrupted routine, are not recorded by the participants. On the contrary, participants listed vacation as an advantage of the year-round calendar.

Unexpected Developments

My Expectations

I expected that the year-round school would have little impact on any of the lives of the stakeholders, since the calendar followed the regular calendar closely. I expected that many positives would be consistent with the research. These positives included higher student achievement, lower absenteeism, and more flexibility in vacation time. I did not anticipate any negatives other than minor incidents like not getting the desired intersession activity. I believed that most of the children share their parents' views about the year-round schools and found it to be positive and rewarding. My own children have viewed the school as "special" as I have. I also expected that few suggestions would be made to improve the program since by my recollection, I have not encountered any suggestions for the school year. I did expect some parent comments to center on improving the intersession activities, such as suggesting different intersession programs.

Based on the information provided in this study my expectations did not equal the information I received from parents. Even though my expectations were based on my experiences as an administrator and a parent, these experiences did little to see other perspectives on the year-round school, which I lacked at the beginning of this study. I believe that this strengthens the study, making it a more useful toll for future program growth and development, and reduces my level of subjectivity in the study.

Teacher Missing

During my teacher focus group discussion I invited six participants, two from each multiage grade level (K/1, 2/3, 4/5). Five teachers accepted, but when the time came for the focus group discussion, the two teachers from the K/1 level were missing. I had two teachers from the 2/3 multiage level and two from the 4/5 multiage level. It is unknown how this may have impacted this study.

Multiage Grouping

I was quite frankly surprised how important the multiage grouping was to the parents and teachers. In my own experience with my children, I have found the multiage grouping to be secondary. In most of the interviews, parents and teachers mentioned how multiage grouping has become as important as the year-round calendar. Upon reflection, I believe that multiage grouping has impacted to a great extent, the responses of parents, teachers, and administrators. Their answers may reflect more about this combination than the year-round calendar itself. I began this study by examining one year-round school, and I finished the study examining a multiage grouping school on a year-round calendar.

Reluctance to Give Input on Disadvantages

In observing the interviews and focus group, I noticed that all of the participants had few comments with regard to offering any disadvantages to the year-round calendar. Many viewed the term "disadvantage" as a negative comment, based upon the responses I gathered when I asked to give the disadvantages to the calendar. In many cases, respondents gave negative comments, instead of disadvantages. I made attempts to probe further with participants, but it was met with little success. Based on the comments from participants stating they saw no disadvantages to the year-round calendar, I believe that, for the most part, they viewed the calendar as having few, if any disadvantages.

Implications for Research

I believe that this study has broader implications than just the Laurel Ridge year-round school. This research provided information about year-round schools that will prove useful to individuals who will initiate a year-round school. This study provided anyone performing research on year-round schools valuable information that increases the wealth of knowledge about year-round schools, and schools in general. This type of research lends itself to providing an abundance of information from individuals, or multiple perspectives. The purpose of action research is "to solve problems in a program, organization, or community (Patton, 1990)." In the suggestions for change and the recommendations, this study attempted to solve the problems that have been identified by the participants. In a broader context, any school division contemplating beginning a year-round school should consider the information gathered in this study.

Recommendations and Final Thoughts

Action research is a cyclical process. If any or all of the changes are implemented for next year, then action research needs to be performed on the year-round school again. Based on the findings of his study, I recommend the following be considered for further study:

- Action research should continue to be used to identify changes in the Laurel Ridge year-round school. Studies conducted in the future can compared to this study to determine if there are changes over time. I recommend that studies like this be conducted on a continuing basis.
- Since a middle school year-round school is planned, a study needs to be conducted on it.
- Multiage grouping implemented with a year-round school needs to be examined, based on the implications of the multiage grouping on this study. Studies on multiage grouping in the Laurel Ridge year-round school would prove helpful in understanding the concept and its effects on the year-round school.

- The changes that are mentioned by the participants should be considered for implementation. As stated earlier, administrators must evaluate what changes are realistic and what changes can be made. Administrators using this study can distinguish between the organizational changes suggested and the instructional changes. Whether the changes are implemented or not, the concerns of the participants needs to be addressed.

My view of the year-round school has not changed since the beginning of this study. I still believe that it has been a success. Two administrators summarized success of the year-round school this way:

> *I think we had parents who wanted this, children who wanted to do this. I think that is obvious by the fact that we have 99% current enrollees wishing to return for the coming school year. I think the non-returns are move outs. We have another large group of children wanting to come in and it's incredible at kindergarten level the number of parents who are enrolling their children (AI-3).*

> *And obviously they must be encouraging some of their friends to join the program because we are going to have 157 in the program right now and we will increase to 285 for the next year. There has been a great big jump in attendance. I'm looking for 6 additional teachers for next year (AI-1).*

With the increasing importance of the year-round calendar, studies like this will be needed to describe the different perspectives. This study clearly shows that the year-round school started by Laurel Ridge has been successful, and with continued reflection and evaluation, can be a model program for any school division.

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